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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006841

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: CHP LEADERSHIP: SECULAR ELITISTS ALIENATE FELLOW  
TURKS

REF: ANKARA 6839

Classified By: POLCOUNS John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary. The ability of the Republican People's Party (CHP) to broaden its electoral and political support beyond its current base is limited by the sociological realities of the Turkish electorate, the public's negative perception of the party, and the failures of the party leadership. The party will be unable to overcome the current limits to its popularity and political viability unless it is able to narrow the chasm between its ideological preferences and contemporary Turkish realities. End Summary.

2. (C) CHP is the party of most of Turkey's secular elite. Most party members, accordingly, describe CHP as a contemporary, secular, and social democratic party. Left-of-center parties, however, have never received a majority of the vote in Turkey since the competitive multi-party system began in 1950. Since 1983, the combined vote for all left-of-center parties has fluctuated between 25 percent and 35 percent. CHP received 11 percent of the vote in 1995, 9 percent of the vote in 1999, and 19 percent of the vote in 2002.

3. (C) CHP receives most of its electoral support from relatively small ideological and sociological groups, e.g. "secularists", leftists, social democrats, Alevis, and "White Turks". (Note: Alevis are heterodox Muslims who comprise about 10 percent of the Turkish population. "White Turks" is a term understood to refer to the narrow elite descending from Islamized Balkan Slavs, Caucasians, and Jews who are widely seen as having only nominally converted to Islam, i.e., "White Turks" are people with no acknowledged roots in Anatolia. In traditional usage, the 90 percent of the rest of the population is referred to as "Black Turks." End note.) Hard-core secularists, according to CHP MP Hasan Aydin, represent only 10-15 percent of the electorate. Pre-eminent national security analyst Faruk Demir estimates that "White Turks" comprise at most 10 percent of the population. Alevis, have historically voted for pro-secular, left-of-center parties, but have more recently split their vote between the left and the right, according to center-right Alevi politician Reha Camuroglu.

4. (C) There is, however, a great deal of overlap between these groups. Most leftists, Alevis, and "White Turks", for example, are secular. Even if CHP adopted a new dynamic leadership and ran a professional modern electoral campaign, it would be very hard pressed to win more than 25 percent of the vote, unless it broadened its appeal beyond its current base.

5. (C) CHP has a reputation for being the party of "rich atheists," according to Aydin. Deniz Baykal, the leader of CHP, and his inner circle have done little to alter this impression. CHP's leaders are often dismissive of Islam. CHP vice chairman (and former career ambassador) Onur Oymen, for example, has publicly stated that Islam and democracy are incompatible and that Turkish democracy is impossible without secularism. Baykal, a former university professor, and other CHP leaders tend to lecture in public speeches and they have a very condescending manner. Most CHP politicians, moreover, dislike rubbing shoulders with the common voter or canvassing for votes. CHP's leaders make little effort to listen to the man in the street's concerns. They tend to believe that it is their responsibility to express their views and it is the people's responsibility to follow them.

6. (C) This behavior is rooted in the fact that CHP's leaders are "White Turks". In the late Ottoman Empire, forefathers of this group were accustomed to being a privileged elite and ruling over a subject people. They promoted Westernizing ideas, a negative view of Anatolian Turks, and a skepticism towards religion. During the early years of the Republic, "White Turks" had a monopoly on positions of power in the military, government bureaucracy, and academia. "White Turks" also dominated the leadership positions in CHP. Finally, "White Turks" were able to take a leadership role in business because many of them received economic advantages from the state -- some "White Turks" started companies that received generous government contracts and others were awarded with businesses or property that had been abandoned by Greeks or Armenians fleeing Turkey or killed during World War I (1914-18) and the War of Independence (1919-22), or

expropriated or taxed into abandonment starting in the mid-1930's.

17. (C) Comment. CHP has been unable to evolve ideologically, alter its condescending demeanor, develop coherent public policies, or expand its electoral base because Baykal and his circle are content to maintain the status-quo and wait in the belief that the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) will fail (REFTEL). Lacking the imagination to broaden its base, CHP continues to defend a rigid "secularism" in such a way that it appears atheist or anti-Muslim. CHP leaders must also shed their arrogance -- they need to listen to common voters and respond to common concerns. Finally, the party must match the skill that AKP has shown for canvassing and block by block party building. The current aversion to grassroots electioneering is no way to build a successful party. End comment.  
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